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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER MP ABBADI SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS FOR
DAMAGING THE STATE'S REPUTATION

REF: AMMAN 1962

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador David Hale for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) On October 9, Jordan's State Security Court sentenced former MP Ahmed Oweidi Al-Abbadi to a two-year prison sentence and a fine of 30 JD (USD 42) for undermining the country's reputation. Abbadi has been in custody for five months, since his publication (purportedly; see paragraph 3) of an open letter on the internet vilifying the GoJ and accusing a minister and the royal family of corruption. The State Security Court also convicted and sentenced Abbadi to 18 months imprisonment for belonging to an "illegal organization" (the Jordanian National Movement - his two-man political party (reftel)) and 3 months for distributing pamphlets about the organization.

¶2. (U) Jordan's penal code dictates that Abbadi serve the longest of the three sentences, including time already spent in detention. (The Court decided Abbadi's imprisonment will be calculated from July 2, 2007, although Abbadi claims he was arrested on May 2.) Under Jordanian law, Abbadi's conviction and sentence may be appealed to the Court of Cassation. Abbadi also faces separate charges of libel and slander, filed in his personal capacity by Minister of Interior Eid Al-Fayez, as well as misuse of electronic transactions under the Electronic Transactions Law, before the Amman Court of Conciliation. If convicted, Abbadi could face additional fines or jail time.

¶3. (U) In an unexpected twist, Abbadi's defense rested on the claim that he did not, in fact, publish the letter. Rather, Abbadi alleged that he was framed, and called the director of Balqa Applied University's computer department as an expert witness to testify that his website could have been hacked. This defense strategy contradicted his family's earlier press releases claiming that Abbadi was being imprisoned for speaking his mind.

¶4. (C) Although the English-language Jordan Times carried an October 3 Human Rights Watch statement critical of the GOJ's handling of the case, Jordanian commentators have largely avoided the topic. When asked privately, normally outspoken democracy advocates have explained their silence by criticizing both Abbadi's character and his crossing of lines that even prominent human rights figures deem inappropriate. Some have suggested that Abbadi is a "bored old man" who should find a better cause. Yet more have suggested that the vicious language employed by Abbadi crossed the lines of moral decency. NOTE: Several Embassy contacts of Palestinian descent frequently hint to Abbadi's staunch record of East-Banker nativism - and visceral criticism of the very presence of Jordanians of Palestinian origin - as a major black mark against him. END NOTE.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: It is striking that none of our contacts in the human rights community defend Abbadi, even privately.

Instead, they universally describe him in pejorative terms: misguided, a provocateur, or simply crazy. They believe that Abbadi went too far with the tone of his criticisms, and several have expressed the view that he deserves whatever punishment he receives. Abbadi's legal defense - that he was framed - suggests that he does not see himself as a poster boy for free speech issues.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Given the ethnic makeup of Jordanian society, the regime remains extremely sensitive to any public expressions which highlight or could exacerbate East Banker-West Banker divisions. Regardless, there is no evident indication of any genuine threat to state security arising from Abbadi's purported actions. The Ambassador raised his concern with senior Palace officials October 10 about the negative message sent by the application of state security laws and courts to what would otherwise seem to be a simple case of offensive speech and possibly libel. Post expects a GOJ response shortly.

¶7. (SBU) SUGGESTED ELEMENTS OF PRESS GUIDANCE: Should there be a need, Post suggests the following as press guidance:

-- We have seen reports of the sentencing of former Member of Parliament Al-Abbadi.

-- Would refer you to the Government of Jordan for specifics about the charges and the sentence.

-- We have a robust dialogue with the Government of Jordan about human rights issues, including freedom of speech.

-- Would refer you to the Country Report on Human Rights Practices for further information.

Hale